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ROBERT BRENT,
FIRST MAYOR OF WASHINGTON CITY.

By

James Dudley Morgan, M. D.

Read before the Society June 8th, 1897.

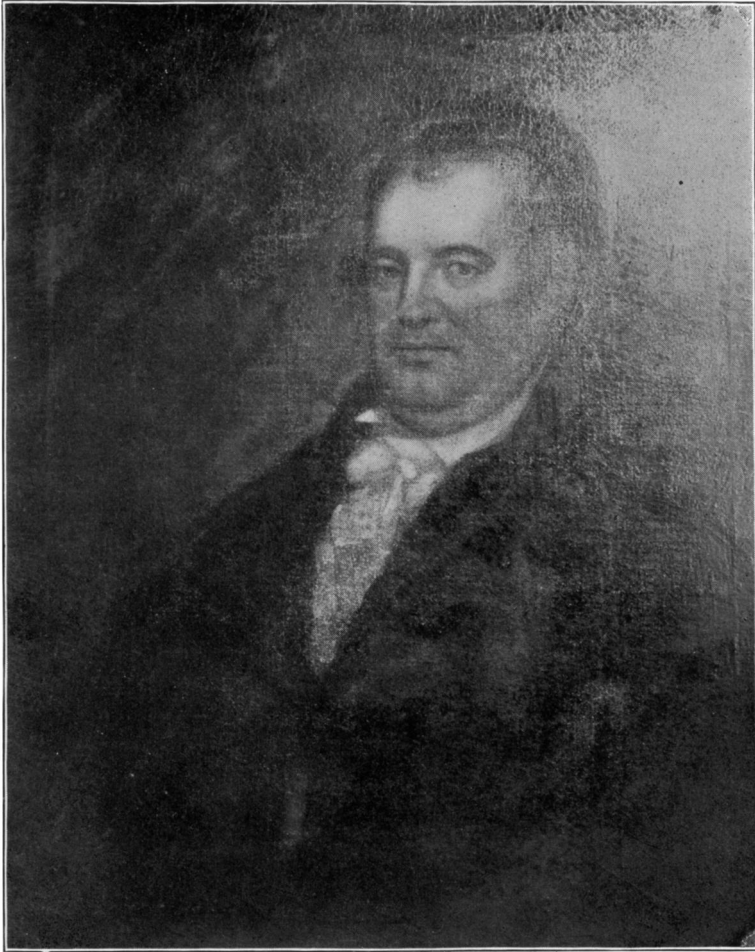
Robert Brent, where born; ancestors; relationship.

Robert Brent, the first Mayor of Washington City in the District of Columbia, was born 1764, at Woodstock estate, in the town of Acquia (exhibit 1), in Stafford County, Virginia, and was the second son of Robert Brent and Anne Carroll. His mother, Anne, was the daughter of Daniel Carroll, of Montgomery County, Maryland, and sister of Archbishop John Carroll; and after her husband's death in Stafford County, Virginia, in 1780, she removed to the residence of her only daughter, Mrs. George Digges, at Green Hill, Prince George's County, Maryland, where she departed this life, 1804.

George Brent, the great-great-grandfather of Robert Brent, the Mayor, was the first of the Woodstock or Acquia branch of the Brent family, who came to America, and was a man of much influence and ability.

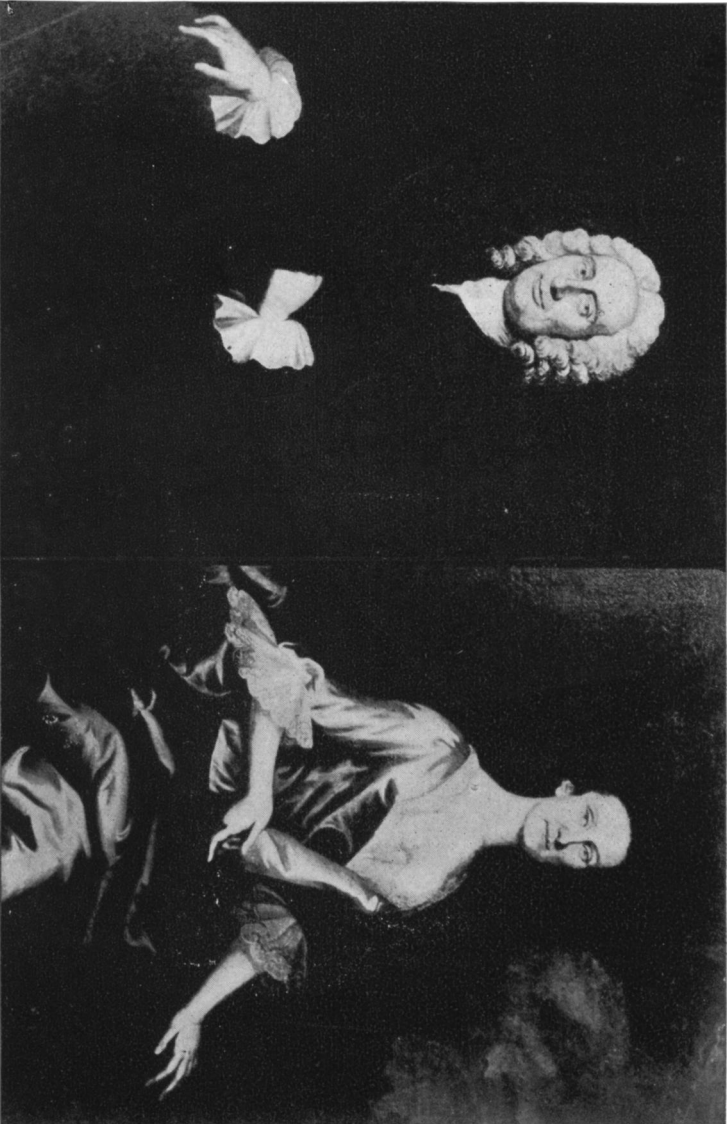
Robert Brent (exhibit 2), the Mayor, and the fifth in the line of descent in America, was married in 1787 to Mary, the eldest daughter of Notley Young, of Prince George's County, one of the original proprietors of Washington. Robert Brent lived for a number of years with his father-in-law at the comfortable and substantial residence known as the Mansion House,

EXHIBIT 2



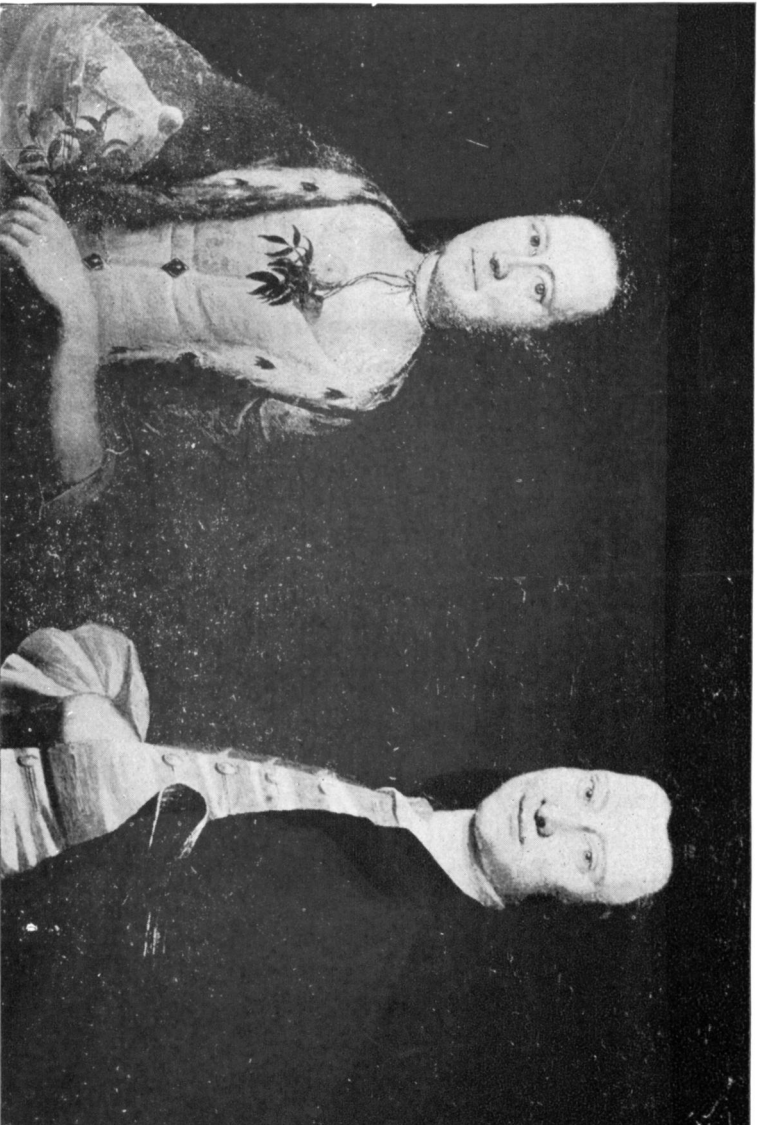
ROBERT BRENT,
THE FIRST MAYOR "OF THE CITY OF WASHINGTON
IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA."

EXHIBIT 3



JUDGE BENJAMIN YOUNG AND WIFE.

EXHIBIT 3



NOTLEY YOUNG AND WIFE.

which was located on G street between 9th and 10th streets, S. W. Mr. Young had the greatest admiration for his son-in-law and felt for him the attachment of a father for a favorite son. Robert Brent had two children: Eleanor (who married Hon. Joseph Pearson of North Carolina), and Robert Young Brent (who married first in 1812 Harriet, the daughter of Garrett Cottinger of Philadelphia, and in 1814, Eliza, the daughter of Jno. Carere of Baltimore. Robert Brent continued to live at the Mansion House until after his wife's death and that of his father-in-law, who made him one of his executors.

His father-in-law, Notley Young. Major L'Enfant a visitor. The Mansion House. Quarries at Acquia.

Before the assumption by Congress of the jurisdiction of the District of Columbia comprehending the family seat of Mr. Notley Young (exhibit 3), Mr. Brent was extensively employed in various trusts both public and private, for the states and individuals. Major L'Enfant was among one of the many who often sought the hospitality of the Mansion House, and there many pros and cons (exhibit 4) were indulged in as to the proper way to lay out the city. The quarries at Acquia, in which Robert Brent was interested, led to much acrimonious discussion. Under date 29 February, 1792, Notley Young writes "that on the day they began to pull down Mr. Carroll's house, Major L'Enfant dined with me. Mrs. Young hearing that Major L'Enfant was going to Virginia requested him to take a letter for her as far as Acquia," the home of the Brents.

About this time there arose some misunderstanding between Messrs. Gibson and Brent, the lessors of the

quarries at Acquia, and Major L'Enfant, concerning the prices to be paid for the lease of the quarries, whether £1500 or £1800, and both Daniel and Robert Brent (exhibits 5) defended their uncle George Brent, one of the lessors, from imputations of exorbitant charges for the use of the quarries. Daniel Brent, under date of February 3rd, 1792, writing his brother, Robert Brent, about the charges made concerning the quarries, says, "we must resque the character of the Brents from an imputation so foul in its nature and so utterly devoid of truth."

These quarries furnished a great amount of stone for the bridges and buildings of Philadelphia. Robert Brent writes from Acquia, November 24, 1791, to his brother Daniel in Philadelphia: "A load of stone would have been sent some time ago to Philadelphia, could a vessel have been got; when one is to be got, it will be shipped." About this same time, February, 1791, Daniel writes to Robert, and it is on a subject with which we are thoroughly familiar and appreciate, "that he would like to get Billy (his brother) a place under the Government, that there were 30 to 40 applicants for every place and all applicants were of the most exemplary character and had the strongest influence."

"Residence for general government." Commissioners for "territory of Columbia." Incorporation of the City of Washington. Appointment of Mayor.

The bill for the location of the general government at a permanent seat was passed and received the President's approval July 16, 1790. The subject first came up in the House of Representatives August 26, 1789, on a motion by Mr. Scott of Pennsylvania, "that a

permanent residence ought to be fixed for the general government." In January, 1791, Washington appointed Thomas Johnson, Daniel Carroll of Maryland and Dr. David Stuart of Virginia as commissioners for the "territory of Columbia." This superintendence of the city continued until May 1802, when the Board of Commissioners was abolished. The Act incorporating "the inhabitants of the City of Washington in the District of Columbia" was passed by Congress and approved the 3rd of May, 1802, by which Act the President appointed the Mayor annually, and the two branches of the council were elected by the people.

Robert Brent was appointed by President Jefferson June 1st, 1802, Mayor of the City of Washington, and was reappointed each year for ten successive terms. He several times accepted the office under protest, and finally declined to serve longer. He served until the second Monday in June, 1812, when by Act of Congress passed May 4, 1812, the duty of electing a Mayor devolved on the city council.

The letter of President Jefferson to Robert Brent tendering him the Mayoralty, and his (Robert Brent's) reply will now be read. Also the original commission of the appointment (Exhibit 6) of Robert Brent, Mayor of the City of Washington.

Washington, June 3, 1802.

Dear Sir:

The Act of Congress incorporating the city of Washington has confided to the President of the U. S. the appointment of the Mayor of the city. As the agency of that officer will be immediately requisite, I am desirous to avail the city of your services in it, if you will permit me to send you the commission. I will ask the favor of an answer to this proposition.

Will you also do me that of dining with me the day after tomorrow (Friday) at half after three? Accept my friendly and respectful salutations.

TH: JEFFERSON.

To Robert Brent, Esq.

Washington, June 3d, 1802.

Dear Sir:

I have had the honor of receiving your favor of this date, asking my acceptance of the appointment of Mayor under the late Act of Congress for incorporating this city.

Altho I feel great diffidence in the talents I possess for executing that duty, in a manner which may afford general satisfaction, yet feeling it a duty to contribute my feeble aid for the public service, I will venture upon its duties.

I beg you Sir to accept my thanks for the honor, which you are about to confer on me and for the obliging manner in which you have been pleased to communicate it.

I will, with pleasure, accept your polite invitation to dinner on Friday next. With sentiments of much respect and esteem I have the honor to be Sir, Your Obt. Ser.

ROBERT BRENT.

Commission of Appointment as Mayor.

Thomas Jefferson, President of the United States of America,

To all to whom these presents shall come Greeting:

Know ye, That reposing special Trust and Confidence in the Integrity, Ability and Diligence of Robert Brent, of the City of Washington, I do in pursuance

In testimony whereof I have caused these Letters
to be made Patent and the Seal of the United States
to be hereunto affixed.

Given under my Hand at the City of Wash-
ington, the first day of June in the year of our
Lord one thousand eight hundred and two, and of
the Independence of the United States of America,
the twenty sixth.

Wm. H. R. M.

By the President

James M. Smith Secretary of State



Thomas Jefferson, President of the United States of America.
 Be all to whom these Presents shall come. Greeting:

Know all, that relating special trust and confidence in the integrity, ability, and diligence of Robert Barent of the City of Washington, I do in pursuance of the powers vested in me by the Act, entitled, "An Act to incorporate the inhabitants of the City of Washington in the District of Columbia, hereby appoint him the said Robert Barent, Mayor of the said City of Washington; And do authorize him to exercise and fulfil the duties of that Office according to Law; And to have and to hold the same with all the powers, privileges and authorities thereto of right appertaining, unto him the said Robert Barent for the term of one year from the day of the date hereof, unless the President of the United States for the time being shall sooner revoke such authorization this Commission

In Testimony whereof I have caused these Letters to be made Patent and the Seal of the United States to be hereunto affixed.
 Given under my Hand at the City of New York

of the powers vested in me by the Act of Congress entitled "An Act to incorporate the inhabitants of the City of Washington, in the District of Columbia" hereby appoint him the said Robert Brent, Mayor of the said City of Washington, and do authorize him to exercise and fulfil the duties of that office according to law; and to Have and to Hold the same with all the powers, privileges and authorities thereto, of right appertaining unto him the said Robert Brent for the term of one year from the day of the date hereof, unless the President of the United States for the time being should be pleased sooner to revoke and determine this Commission.

In Testimony whereof, I have caused these Letters to be made Patent, and the Seal of the United States to be hereunto affixed.

Given under my hand, at the City of Washington the first day of June in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and two; and of the Independence of the United States of America the twenty-seventh.

(SEAL)

TH: JEFFERSON.

By the President:

James Madison, Secretary of State.

Letters to Madison and Jefferson.

Robert Brent, as will be seen from the following letters to Secretary Madison, June 7th, 1806, and to President Jefferson, May 31st, 1808, was "anxious for the President to get some other person to execute the duties of the office."

(To Mr. Madison.)

City of Washington, June 7th, 1806.

Dear Sir:

You will excuse me for reminding you that the

Commission of Mayor ceased on the 1st inst., and that it becomes necessary some appointment should be made, as business occurs daily which cannot be done by any other.

I wished the president could have got some other person to execute the duties of this office; but in consequence of your intimation, that it would be more agreeable to him, that I should continue to act, I am ready again to take upon myself the tasks, and will accept the commission accordingly.

With sentiments of esteem and respect I have the honor to be, Dear Sir,

Your Obt. Ser.

ROBERT BRENT.

(To President Jefferson.)

City of Washington, May 31st, 1808.

Dear Sir:

The Commission with which I have been honored, as Mayor of this city expires this day, it will therefore be proper that a new Commission be made out and forwarded as early as possible.

Presuming that the situation of paymaster, to which Genl. Dearborn has intimated you desire to appoint me, will occupy my whole time, it will be proper that some other person should be commissioned as Mayor of this City and I could wish the new Commission may be so made out. If, however, you should not have made up your mind as to a successor—at this moment—when it is essential the office should not be vacant—you may again fill up the Commission to me, with an understanding that on the first of July some other person be selected to fill that office at which time

I shall resign in his favor. I have the honor to be with sincere respect and esteem, Dear Sir,

Your Mo. Obt. Ser.

ROBERT BRENT.

D Sir:

The foregoing is a copy of a letter which I wrote you, and was about delivering it at the post office when you were in Virginia, but which I was prevented from doing by an intimation from Mr. Munroe that you had directed the letters addressed to you to remain at the post office here on and after that day. I have thought it proper imm-ly on your arrival to repeat my desire that some other other person may be selected as Mayor in my place, believing as I do that the situation to which I am about to be called will require all my attention.

With sentiments of much respect

I have the honor to be Sir,

Your Obt. Ser.

ROBERT BRENT.

Washn, Saty. June 11th, 1808.

Offices held by Robert Brent.

Among the many other offices of trust held by him was that of Judge of the Orphan's Court, D. C., Justice of the Peace, member of the School Board and Paymaster General of the Army.

Appointed.

Justice of the Peace of the D. C.	March 16, 1801.
" " " " "	March 14, 1807.
" " " " "	Nov. 18, 1812.
" " " " "	Sept. 1, 1817.

Judge of the Orphan's Court, D. C., April 16, 1806. to Feb. 1814.

Mayor of Washington, June 1, 1802.	}	Jefferson.
“ “ 1803.		
“ “ 1804.		
“ “ 1805.		
10 terms. “ “ 1806.		
“ “ 1807.		
“ “ 1808.	}	Madison.
“ “ 1809.		
“ “ 1810.		
“ “ 1811.		

Paymaster General of the Army July 1, 1808 to Aug. 28, 1819.

Summarized:

J. P.	1801 to 1817 (?)
Mayor,	1802 to 1812
Judge Orphan's Ct.	1806 to 1814.
Pay M. Genl.	1808 to 1819.

He held all four offices from 1808 to 1812, and was also member of the School Board. June 7th, 1815, he was made first president of the Patriotic Bank, which occupied the site of the present Bank of the Republic. In 1814, he, with Walter Smith and Thomas Swann, were appointed Commissioners for the District of Columbia, to receive subscriptions for the capital stock of the National Bank, to provide funds for the war with Great Britain.

Some of the Acts of City Councils under Robert Brent.

The first Act passed by the First and Second Chambers of the City Council of Washington and approved by Mayor Robert Brent, July 20th, 1802, was a device of seal for the City of Washington. That the spirit of unity is inseparably associated with the glory of our Coun-

try is well foreshown in that simple proposition, which was adopted that day by the corporation of the City of Washington: "That the seal of the City of Washington shall be the representation of an edifice supported on fifteen columns, having the word 'Washington' at the top; the words 'City seal,' with the figure '1802' at the bottom and the motto 'Union' beneath the dome."

The City Council was very active in the passage of many ordinances for the public good and beautifying the city. They organized a school board, encouraged the establishment of a university for young men, appointed supervisors of markets, organized a police force, made appropriations for opening and repairing streets; for the repair of pumps and wells; established a fire department and purchased several fire engines and protected the city by the passage of various stringent fire ordinances.

Among some of the very many of the Acts passed and receiving the approval of the Mayor in Robert Brent's time, are the following:

An ordinance approved October 6th, 1802, was the establishment of the Centre Market on the south side of Pennsylvania Avenue, between Seventh and Ninth streets, west. Section 5 of this Act could not be too rigidly enforced to-day. "That no person shall sell or expose for sale in said market any unsound, blown, or unwholesome meat or articles of provision, under the penalty of five dollars for every offence."

An Act approved Nov. 19th, 1802, "That two hundred dollars be and hereby is appropriated for the purpose of opening, clearing and rendering passable for wagons West Fourteenth, From North F street."

An Act approved January 10, 1803, to provide for the prevention and extinction of fire "That every pro-

prietor of any dwelling house or store-house shall provide as many fire buckets of leather, as there are stories to such house."

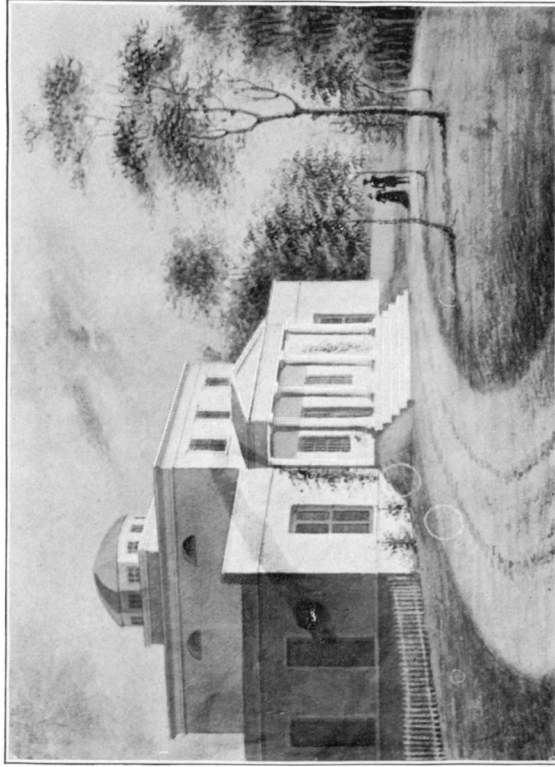
Sec. 6 of Act approved January 10, 1803, "That there shall be procured by the Mayor one substantial fire engine to be kept near the Centre Market; and so soon thereafter as may be, two additional fire engines shall be procured to be kept near the east and west markets."

"An Act making appropriations for the repair of pumps and wells."

"An Act that every possessor of a lot whereon there shall during the months of June, July, August and September be an artificial excavation, containing stagnant water more than twenty four hours, shall fill up or drain the same, under a penalty of ten dollars, after notice as aforesaid."

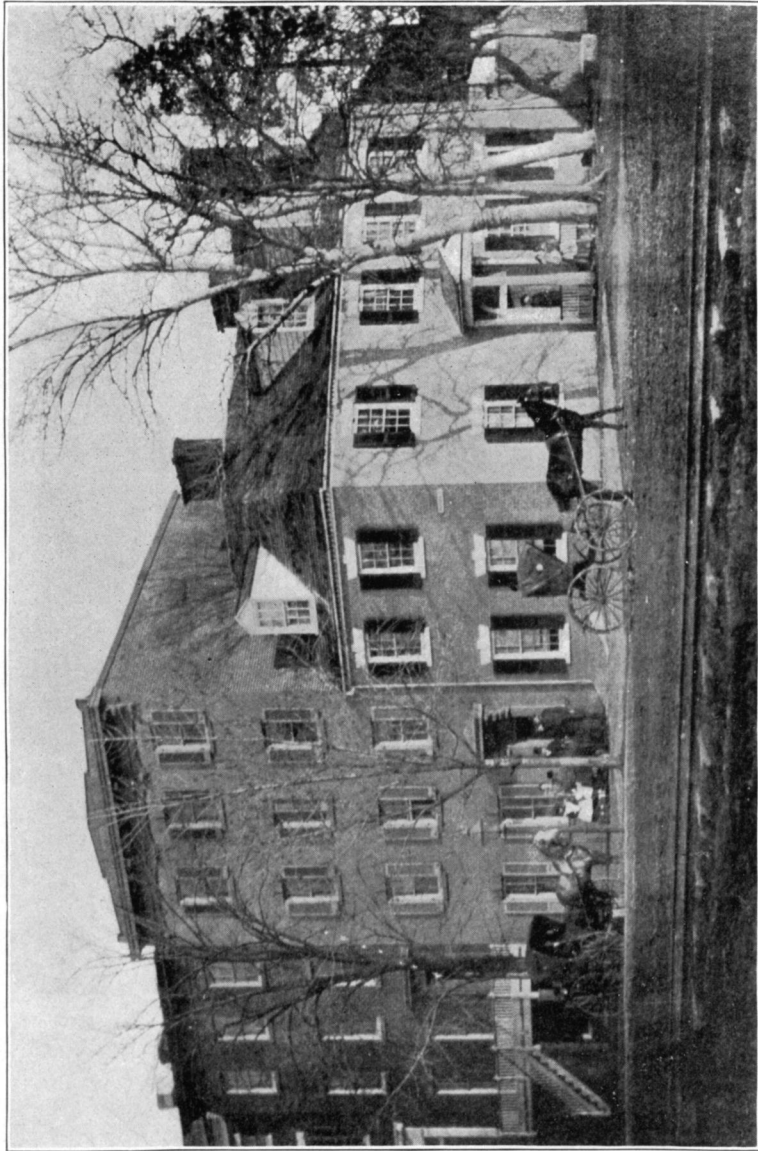
April 20, 1807, the city corporation made regulations regarding the sweeping of chimneys, substantially as follows: The Mayor (Robert Brent) was authorized to make a contract with such person as he might deem a proper one, and to give to him the exclusive right to sweep the chimneys in Washington for a term of not to exceed three years. The chimneys were to be swept once in each three months from the 1st day of April to the 1st day of October, and once in each two months the rest of the year, between five and seven o'clock in the morning, or at such time as the chimney sweep and the householder could agree upon. The chimney sweep was entitled to receive from the person so contracting with him the sum of ten cents for each story of each flue or chimney swept; and if any chimney or flue should take fire from the presence of soot in the chimney within two months from the last sweeping, then the chimney sweep should pay a fine of \$5,

EXHIBIT 8



BRENTWOOD.

EXHIBIT 7



THE "CORNER HOUSE," WHICH ROBERT BRENT (MAYOR) BUILT AND LIVED IN.
THE "HOUSE NEXT TO THE CORNER," HE BUILT FOR HIS SON ROBERT YOUNG BRENT ON HIS MARRIAGE.

and if any chimney should take fire that had not been swept, then the owner of the house should pay a fine of \$5. As required to do, Mayor Brent gave notice to the citizens that he had made a contract for the sweeping of the chimneys with Job Haight, who would commence June 10, 1807.

Where Robert Brent lived and died.

Robert Brent, the first Mayor of Washington, built, lived and died in the house situated on the southeast corner of 12th and Maryland avenue, South West (exhibit 7). Sir Augustus Foster, who was Secretary at Washington to the British Minister during the years 1804-5 and 6 says "very few private gentlemen have houses in Washington. I only recollect three: Mr. Brent, Mr. Taylor and Mr. Carroll." The adjoining house, Mayor Brent built for his son Robert Young Brent at the time of his marriage. Robert Brent, a short while before his death, Sept. 14, 1819 (see *National Intelligencer*, Sept. 19, 1819) resigned the Paymaster Generalship in the Army. About this time he suffered a stroke of paralysis, and although partially recovering, he never again entered active life, but passed his remaining days in occasional visits to Brentwood (exhibit 8), to superintend the building of a vault, where he is buried.

EXHIBIT I.

(Town of Acquia) Washington, D. C.,

June 1897.

Dear Doctor Morgan:

I visited the old Aquia burying-ground in Stafford Co., Va., about a year ago. It must be very interest-

ing to one, who is tracing up the Brents. I noticed several tombstones bearing that name there; one in particular, as I now recollect it, tracing the pedigree back to England; the name being spelt "Brant."

This burying-ground is now deserted, and almost unknown, being in a dense wood and underbrush, near the once prosperous and now utterly extinct village of Aquia.

With best wishes and regards,

H. P. GERALD.

EXHIBIT 4. A.

(Major L'Enfant at the Mansion House.)

On the day they began to pull down Mr. Carroll's house, Major L'Enfant dined with me. Mrs. Young hearing he was going to Virginia, requested him, to take a letter for her as far as Aquia. He politely promised he would. She then said, she would send it to him in the morning. She wrote to her Sister Brent; and as I was going to George-Town, I took the letter with me. I met Major L'Enfant, and taking the letter out of my pocket, delivered it to him. This letter covered two others, taken out of the Post Office at George Town. The one, as I afterwards found, from a Stone-cutter of New York. The other to Mr. Robert Brent from France. The letter which Major L'Enfant brought up from Virginia, for me, was a blank cover, enclosing a letter to Mrs. Eliza Brent, who was then in Maryland. I believe this letter was directed to the care of Mr. George Greham, who probably, put it under cover, and directed it to me.

I declare, that to the best of my remembrance I never wrote to Mr. George Brent in my life. That I only have wrote one letter to Mr. Robert Brent since the sale of the Lots and that was entirely upon the subject of Pine Logs, enclosing him the Commissioners' Advertisement for contracting for them; and advising him, if he had any thoughts of contracting for them, to lose no time in coming up. I do further declare, that I never knew till after Major L'Enfant had made the contract with Mr. George Brent for the Quarries, what he was empowered to give.

NOTLEY YOUNG.

Mr. Young's narrative
abt. the Letters &c.
inclosed in T. J. 29 feb. 92.

EXHIBIT 4. B.

(Mr. Brent, Mr. Carroll and Major L'Enfant.)

In a Letter I received from him (Daniel Carroll of Duddington) Yesterday, he sent me the Copies I now inclose from Mr. Brent, Major L'Enfant and Mr. Young—waiving the rudeness of Mr. Walker's and Major L'Enfant's Letters, it is apparent that they both hold the Commrs in sovereign Contempt and that the Major would have them act a very subordinate part or not at all—Major L'Enfant in his Conversation with Mr. Fenwick and Mr. Walker in his Letter refers to the filling up of a Hole as if countenanced by the president when the Major must remember very different Things past at the time—

Thomas Jefferson
to

Thomas Johnson,
29 Feby. 1792.

(Danl. Carroll's house.)

In riding over Federal Hill with Major L'Enfant on the day that Mr. Danl. Carroll's house were first began to be pulld down. Seeing a ditch that had been dug & filld up I observed to the Major. You have done work & undone it again, turning round, (for he was before me) he said this ought to have convinced Mr. Carroll of my powers—for the President was on the Spot the day this was done—

This is the substance of a conversation between Major L'Enfant—& your Hble Servt.

IGNAS. FENWICK.

inclosed in T. J. of 29 feb. 92.

EXHIBIT 5. A.

(Quarries at Acquia.)

Memorandum of observations from Mr. George Walker relating to the purchase of Quarries by the Commissioners under an Act for laying out the Federal City from George Brent—

That in a Company in George Town either at the Counting Room of Mr. Davidson or at Mr. Suter's he does not recall which, it was observed by Major L'Enfant or one of the Company, that George Brent was disposed to sell the Quarries for £1500 when Major L'Enfant was in Dumfries—treating with Mr. Gibson, & that upon the Major's return to Acquia upon hinting to Mr. Geo. Brent that he supposed he would be now satisfied with £1500 that he replied his price now was £1800 that he had something in his Pocket which justified his asking it.

January 17th 1792

Mr. Brent's

Memorandum.

EXHIBIT 5. B.

(Quarries at Acquia.)

Feb. 3, 92

Major L'Enfant says he will write to you to-morrow answering the question which is proposed in yr. letter to me—In the mean time I have authority to say his answer will be in the Negative—He opposes to the circulating report of what he said at Mr. Davidson's Compting House, at Suter's or at other places, a direct contradiction; but he will fully explain himself in his letter to you. Convinced tho of its being in language tantamount to what I have stated above, I wish you to make up of this letter (if his shou'd not reach you as soon) to rescue the Character of our uncle from an imputation so foul in its own nature, & so utterly devoid of Truth—

DANL. BRENT.

To

Mr. Robt. Brent
copy of an extract

Original, autograph or certified copies of all exhibits are in the possession of James Dudley Morgan.

The PRESIDENT: Mr. Weller has prepared a paper which he will read to you, upon the four mayors who succeeded Mr. Brent, giving a brief outline, and bringing the history that far forward.